The Role of Strategic Leadership during Change

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Abstract
The modern business environment is highly dynamic due to numerous forces that interact with each other to affect organizations. Firms respond to these changes resulting in change programs, which affect the whole organization as a system. This study focuses on the role of strategic leadership on successful change management and how strategic leaders ensure effective management of strategic change programs. The study employed survey research design with a sample of 173 respondents drawn from executive directors, senior managers and managers through stratified sampling who were picked by simple random sampling from airlines. Self-administered questionnaires and personal interviews were used as well as data from books, journals, periodicals, company reports, press releases and the internet. Data analysis was done using descriptive analysis (percentages, frequencies and averages) followed by data presentation on bar graphs and tables. The study concludes strategic leadership is ultimate for success of change programs as it directs all organization resources towards a common goal by effectively motivating employees to achieve a desired common change vision. It is recommended that change leaders and policy makers know the roles they want strategic leadership to play during change and they integrate the numerous resources involved to achieve the change vision.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, strategic change, organization, change leaders, change programs

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INTRODUCTION

Strategic leadership has become a vital tool for the overall achievement of organizational success. It ensures all organizational systems are working together towards the achievement of the ultimate strategic intent put in place. "Researchers on quality have long acknowledged the importance of leadership and commitment required for a successful quality programme" (Almaraz, 1994:11). Managers should learn the art of strategic leadership because modern organizations operate in dynamic environments that keep on changing. They are constantly faced with change of forces both within and around the organization and thus they must respond to these changes to maintain their market positions and continue building competitive advantage.

Senior and Fleming (2006) maintain that organizations are influenced by a multitude of factors from both the internal and external environments. With the change having on all organization systems, there must be agents that envision and influence all stakeholders to focus on achieving the strategic intent. Strategic leadership can be defined as a manager's potential to express a strategic vision for the organization or a team and to motivate and persuade others to follow that vision. Cole (1995) defines strategic leadership as the ability to influence the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of others. Strategic leaders help the group attain its goals through maximum utilization of capabilities and as noted by Spector (2007), leaders facilitate progress, inspire groups and provide direction. However, change leaders are faced by the challenge of managing all the firm's resources during change. This is because of numerous reasons ranging from emergent changes taking place simultaneously to balancing the demands that result from change programs with the demands of managing today's business performance.

Hayes (2007) concludes the proposition that some changes happen quickly while others evolve gradually suggesting that the tempo of change depends on the situation. "The strategic management model assumes that the change in the organization can be captured by one or a few objectives. But what if a change-process involves multiple changes simultaneously?" (Bordum, 2010:248). This shows there cannot be a specific solution to managing change as stated by Harigopal (2006), yet managers and leaders must be so careful and adequately prepared to manage the change process and the change of other organization systems that comes with it. This paper looks at strategic leaders as change facilitators and how they manage organizational resources to achieve strategic vision. The second part presents leadership in times of change that is followed by an insight on

management of change programs by looking at successful management of change for competitive success, failure of change programs and criticism in change management. The fourth section gives the methodology and thereafter the result and discussion of findings. Finally, conclusions are made based on the topic of study.

Strategic Leaders as Change Facilitators

Strategic leaders lead organizations on strategic grounds where they seek to achieve organizational objectives by creating vision and energizing organization systems towards the achievement of those visions. Strategic leaders stand out from their followers by having unique characteristics that support their call. Drawing on a study of 48 firms among the Fortune 500 largest US manufacturers, Useem (1996) gives the behaviours characterizing the most successful CEO's as being visionary, showing confidence in the self and in others, communicating high- performance expectations and standards, personally exemplifying the firm's vision, values and standards and demonstrating personal sacrifice, determination, persistence and courage (as cited in Senior & Fleming, 2006).

For modern organizations, human resources count as the most valuable asset of the organization with a feature of irreplaceability. This is because abilities and skills are individualistic. According to Senior and Fleming (2006), visionary leaders have the ability to explain their vision for the firm to others by emphasizing on behaviour and applying the vision through different leadership context. Visionary leaders are termed as charismatic with the ability to energize people by creating commitment, creativity and motivation. Instrumental leaders on the other hand focus more on organizing systems and controlling organization activities. They are interested in ensuring strategic objectives are met by steering operations. Strategic leaders have to exhibit both spectrums of directing operations as instrumental leaders and motivating people to follow the desired vision and achieve objectives after the change process. They should have the ability to integrate organization systems and the people who work within those systems.

Leadership in Times of Strategic Change

Business environments require diverse leadership techniques due to the effect from the dissimilar and dynamic forces surrounding organization. Andriopoulos and Dawson (2009) argue that there are external influences and internal factors which interlink and overlap in determining the speed, direction, and outcomes of organizational change. This means that strategic leaders steer organizations differently in different situations. Managing

people can be a key factor influencing competitive success. People related-issues should be a central concern for leaders and change agents. According to Cole (1995), firms in stable business environments require transactional leadership which focuses on leading organizations to achieve their objectives more efficiently by linking job performance to valued rewards and through ensuring that employees have the resources needed to get the job done. It improves organizational efficiency and gives time for growth. Transactional leaders determine what employees need to achieve on their own, help the employees become confident that they can achieve their objectives, classify the requirements and their objectives by expanding their necessary efforts (Senior & Fleming, 2006).

Transformational leadership on the other hand is suitable for firms in highly turbulent environments. It is the leadership of changing organization systems with a focus on building advantage. It includes leadership of change in strategies, culture and structures to fit with the surrounding environments of the modern organization. Transformational leaders are change agents who energize organization systems to embrace change effectively and foster creativity. Spector (2007) advices that lead change agents should aim at developing the organization and minimizing forces slowing down the change process. With the different elements to be managed during change, strategic leaders should device the best ways of integrating all these components without compromising any of them as they are all important in managing change. With all the correct systems in place and no effective leadership, the change process is bound to fail due to lack of direction, motivation and coordination which will hinder the achievement of strategic advantage. Strategic leaders can effectively steer towards success by managing people and information on the basis of the strategic choice in place.

In times of change, transformational leadership proves to be the ultimate tool because it deals with the human aspect of the organization. A transformational leader has charisma which is providing vision, mission and pride. Senior and Fleming (2006) state that transformational leaders inspire by communicating high expectations, use of symbols and focus of efforts beside stimulating intellectual capacity by promoting intelligence and rationality. Together this leads to effective change management.

Management of Strategic Change Programs

Managers should recognize that change is a process with a step-by-step movement. To successfully implement change, leaders should understand the drivers and content of different change programs at an early stage of the lifecycle. The firm may scan the

environment and understand its strategic goals, success criteria, and the urgency of each program. This gives it the ability to assess and define initiatives, benefits and resources to be involved. Top management should be committed in the change process for successful manifestation of the process. To unify people in the firm, a shared corporate vision should be formulated and communicated to everyone. Stanleigh (2008) states a strategic change vision should go beyond the normal five-year forward looking plan. This builds a culture of continuous change that is generated from inspirational communication from the leadership team to persuade others and support the new direction.

Almaraz (1994) acknowledges how researchers have admitted the importance of leadership for successful quality programmes. People in strategic positions should be empowered to act in a way to foster the desired change by providing resources and allowing them to make changes in their new ways of involvement. With the allocation of resources, there should be accountability and governance by creating roles and monitoring through steering committees. Franken, Edwards and Lambert (2009) state that review, learning and improvement of change capability is necessary towards the end of a change process. There should be ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of the change capability. This assessment will reflect how much the strategies used are effective and how well they respond to the changing surrounding.

Failure of Change Programs

The change process is highly complex due to the disruptions of various business systems. For change to occur, the external environment plays a major influencing factor. According to Diefenbach (2007), the external environment is portrayed as hostile, dangerous and it threatens survival and future existence of groups. Driving forces of change are mergers and acquisitions, innovation, technology, sense of urgency and decline in projections. However "when 75% of the leadership is honestly convinced that business as usual is no longer an acceptable plan" (Stanleigh, 2008: 35), then change is introduced. Research has found most organizations realize only 60% of the potential value of their strategies due to inadequate planning and implementation during change (Franken et al, 2009). Sometimes change may involve multiple, simultaneous changes.

According to Bordum (2010), this poses the question of discussion in hierarchies or complexity because it is often assumed that change involves a business problem or situational problem. When changes is managed only at the executive level, employees become rebellious and feel that they are tools used to realize organization objectives.

Diefenbach (2007) states that resistance to change should be interpreted as evidence that change is not only right and necessary, but that clear leadership, aggressive leaders and guidance to opponents are required. Stanleigh (2008) notes that managers at times take employees to change programs and expect change to occur. This affects staff morale and creates a glass wall between change facilitators and employees. Balancing the demands that result from change programs with the demands of managing today's business performance is a difficult task for managers and rarely does change result in an equilibrium state.

Criticisms in Change Management

The shortcomings of the change management framework arise mostly from the difference between how managers interpret change management and the real underlying factors in change management. The differences in perceptions of what change management is influence behaviour. Saka (2003) states that managers hold views and visions that often conflict with established mental models and hence they fail to be put into practice. Internal change agents are mostly technical or special skill managers who find themselves as facilitators of the change process. They lack the change management skills and have to balance both their technical expertise with change facilitation. This slows down the implementation process.

The problems of change management can simply be attributed to the uncertainty in the change process that change agents seek to disguise. Fronda and Moriceau (2008) argue that individuals often perceive perpetual change as a generator of chaos, and anomia, i.e. loss of meaning for the subject who has lived in one organization world and who is asked to adopt the practices, norms and behaviour of others. People therefore accept change only due to pressure but still, the culture within them does not change to fit with the new state making them become rigid and only change on the outside temporarily. "This brings the concept of alignment which has been criticized on the grounds that it is difficult to apply in practice" (Hayes,2007,P. 54) whereby all organization systems are supposed to be consistent. Some view effective management as reacting and responding to the external environment while others view it as being proactive by using the resources and capabilities in the firm to design the environment. Bordum (2010), states that strategic balance assumes planning can be rational. It creates unity in the managed organization. The distinction between the internal organization resources and the external environment and opportunities is also clearly defined and possible to make. When change comes in, managers perceive appropriate alignment

from their own points of view that makes it difficult to establish any shared understanding of the desired alignment.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed survey research design. The target population comprised of 994 managerial level employees from airline firms who have the capacity to assist in making strategic decisions. Airline firms were selected because they are constantly faced with change due to the dynamism of their operating environment.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) and Peil (1995), a representative sample must be at least 10% of the entire target population. Thus from the target population of 994, the sample of 17.4% was representative enough for us to deem the data collected dependable and reliable. The respondents were identified by use of stratified sampling technique where the target population was divided into 9 executives, 23 managers, and 962 managerial staff making a total of 3 strata. Malhotra et al (2006) states that stratified sampling is precise as it includes all important sub-populations (as cited in Polonsky & Waller, 2011, p.141). From the population of 994, the researcher sampled 173 respondents (17.4%) i.e. 6 executive directors, 17 senior managers and 150 managers stratum. Thereafter random sampling from each stratum picked the respondents as the technique is projectable.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Personal interviews and questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Secondary internal sources of data included periodicals, company reports and press releases. External sources used were relevant journals, publications and the internet. Self-administered questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions were used as questionnaires are considered the best in collection of primary data. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) state that questionnaires provide an avenue for the researcher to ask probing questions., They are also fast, cheap and can be self-administered. Different interview guides for each strata with both structured and general questions were also used. This allowed for probing questions during interviews to obtain as much information as possible. Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) state that interview guides give the respondent freedom to express their situation in relation to the matter in question. Data collection instruments used in the research can be obtained from the corresponding author.

Data Analysis Method

Qualitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics whereby percentages, averages and frequencies were used from responses on a five point Likert Scale. Analysis was done using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion focus on the role of strategic leadership in strategic change by giving findings on the functions of leaders during strategic change, elements reflecting leadership during strategic change and the measures for successful strategic leadership in change programs. However, forces that lead to strategic change in organizations that demand for strategic leadership to achieve the strategic vision were first identified.

Forces Influencing Strategic Change

The external forces that influence strategic change in the respondent's area of work were identified. 69% of the respondents stated that competitor move or pressure is a major force, 51% were for security threats, 43% said product innovation, 41% stated customer demands, 27% ascertained globalization, and 9% regulation requirements. Only 2% singled out supplier pressure. All the respondents unanimously stated that technological advancements and innovations drive for strategic change as shown in Table 1. Firms consider technology advancement, competitor moves and security threats as strong drivers of strategic change. New product innovation and customer demands call for change as the firm has to respond by creating newer and better products for their markets.

TABLE1
Forces Influencing Strategic Change

| Force Influencing Change	Frequency	Percentage
Technology Advancement	110	100%
Competitor Moves	76	69%
Security Threats	56	51%
Product Innovation	47	43%
Customer Demands	45	41%
Globalization	30	27%
Regulatory Requirements	10	9%
Supplier Pressure	2	2%

Functions of change leaders during strategic change

The respondents gave the functions of change agents, change facilitators and managers during strategic change. This was based on a 5 point Likert Scale. No variable was disagreed

or strongly disagreed upon. Focusing on ongoing changes in the external environment was found to be indifferent. It was agreed that change leaders focus on employee participation and involvement, employee education and awareness, demanding performance, managing resistance, building cross-sectional teams and supporting stakeholder interest. Finally it was strongly agreed that change leaders communicate the change vision. The graph on Figure 1 shows the functions of change leaders during strategic change. The functions are pitted against the average of responses.

FIGURE 1
Functions of Change Leaders during Strategic Change
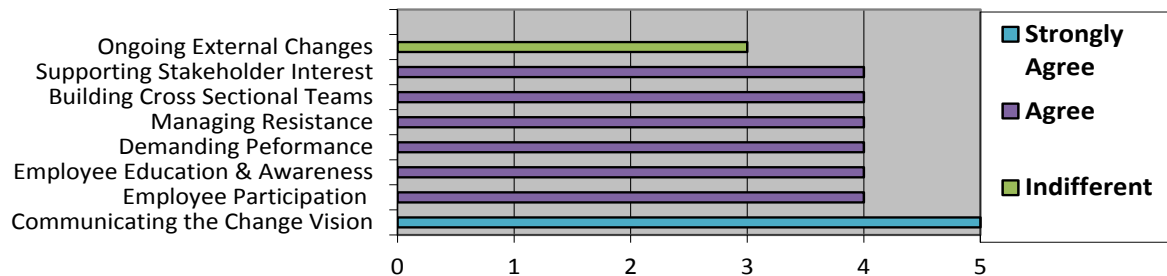
Elements Reflecting Leadership Positions during Change

The respondents gave the elements used to identify leadership positions whereby the responses were grouped into disagree/strongly disagree, indifferent and agree/strongly agree. Seventy nine (90.8%) respondents agreed that authority is used to ascertain leaders whereby the higher the authority held the more the person is recognized.85.1% of the respondents agreed that resource allocation identifies leadership positions in times of change because if an employee has control over massive resources, that will viewed as a leader during the change process. Fifty nine (67.8%) respondents agreed that accountability identifies leaders in times of change whereby the more the number of employees or tasks one is accountable for, the more followers one motivates. Forty eight (55.2 %) respondents agreed that responsibility singles out a leader when the person is in charge of more tasks. Finally, only 39.1 % agreed that protocol helps in identifying a leader during strategic change. This is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2
**Elements Reflecting Leadership Positions during Change**

	D/SD	I	SA/ A
Resource Allocation	3.4% (3)	11.5% (10)	85.1% (74)
Authority	6.9% (6)	2.3% (2)	90.8% (79)
Responsibility	44.8% (39)	0	55.2% (48)
Accountability	28.8% (25)	3.4% (3)	67.8% (59)
Protocol	54% (47)	6.9% (6)	39.1% (34)

Numbers in parenthesis indicate the frequencies

Measures of Successful Strategic Leadership in Change Programs

The respondents also gave the measures of successful strategic leadership in change programs. This was indicated on a 5 point Likert Scale. There were no measures strongly disagreed or disagreed on. Respondents were indifferent on empowered managers. It was agreed that winning employee involvement and achieving short-term wins were measures for successful change programs. Realizing monetary benefits of the system, innovation and creativity, achieving long-term goals and developing future leaders were strongly agreed on. Change programs that achieve the above mentioned measures were found to be successful and change leaders strived to realize them by the end of the change process. The graph on Figure 2 shows the measures of successful change programs pitted against the average.

FIGURE 2
Measures of Successful Strategic Leadership in Change Programs
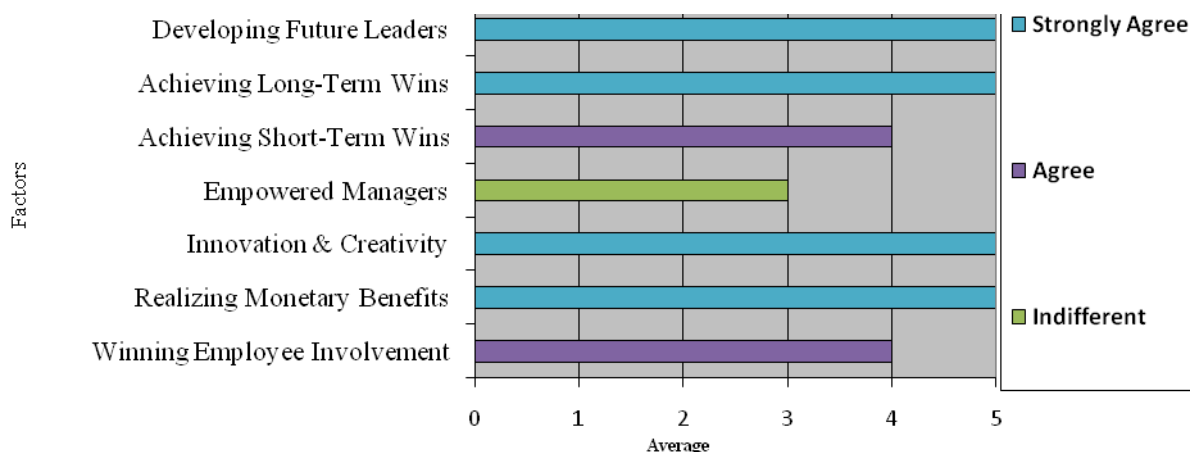
CONCLUSION

The modern business environment is highly dynamic due to numerous forces that interact with each other to affect the organization. Firms in turn have to respond to these changes which result in strategic change to align strategies with the new state of the environment. With these changes, the firm is constantly faced with the challenge of managing

complex change programs. In times of change, managers, change agents and facilitators have a vital role of expressing the strategic change vision for their organization or team and to motivate and persuade others to follow that vision. Strategic leaders therefore facilitate progress, inspire groups and provide direction. The success and failure of strategic change depends on the leadership throughout the change process because change processes are dynamic with numerous resources to manage.

Organization leaders should identify forces in and around their environments that may influence strategic change to realize how significant these forces are to their operations. When a change process embarks in the firm, there should be identification of the functions of change leaders toward such programs. With the realization of these functions, managers ascertain the relevant leaders for specific change programs in the units facing change. This is done by identifying elements reflecting leadership positions during change. After the realization of these leaders, they are given the responsibility of steering strategic change while motivating followers to focus on the strategic change vision and achieve the objectives at the end of the change program. Measures of successful strategic leadership in change programs should be predetermined to help in monitoring and controlling the change process. The ultimate role of strategic leadership in strategic change is to ensure the change process attains its objectives by fostering effective management of employees throughout the change process. Change leaders and policy makers should therefore know the roles they want strategic leadership to play during change and how they will fulfil these to guarantees the change process that revolves around numerous resources including employees is effectively integrated to achieve the change vision.

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APPENDIX
TABLE 2
Response Rate

Questionnaires		
State of Questionnaires	**Number of questionnaires**	**Percentage (%)**
Complete & returned	87	67
Incomplete	2	1.5
Not returned	41	31.5
Total	**130**	**100**
Interviews		
State of Interview	**Number of respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Successful	23	53.5
Not Successful	20	46.5
Total	**43**	**100**

TABLE 3
Management Strata Representation by Respondents

	Executive Directors	**Senior Managers**	**Managers**	**Total**
Questionnaires				
Complete	1	4	82	**87**
Incomplete	1	0	1	**2**
Not returned	1	6	34	**41**
Total	**3**	**10**	**117**	**130**
Interviews				
Successful	1	4	18	**23**
Not Successful	2	3	15	**20**
Total	**3**	**7**	**33**	**43**